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## Italy

### Livestock and Products

#### BSE and Blue Tongue Update

2004

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**Report Highlights:**

Despite a declining number of cases during the 2001-2003 period, Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) and Blue Tongue (BT) are still major issues for Italian farmers and consumers. Testing for BSE and vaccination for BT have proven to be crucial to restore farm productivity and customer confidence.

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### **BSE**

Between January 2001 and January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2004 a total of 117 cases of BSE were confirmed in Italy. However the number of cases detected per year is decreasing. In 2004 there have already been 2 confirmed cases.

**Italy – BSE situation as at January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2004**

	2001	2002	2003	2004	Total
<b>Confirmed cases</b>	50	36	29	2	<b>117</b>
<b>Of which imported</b>		2	2		<b>4</b>
<b>Born locally after the ban*</b>	41	30	24		
<b>Tested</b>	465,403	745,521	750,633	>15,000	<b>&gt;1,977,000</b>

\*Ban of Meat Bovine Meal (MBM) from 9/15/1994

Source. Official statistics from Ministry of Health and University of Turin

The northern regions of Italy are the most affected by BSE, with peak values in the provinces of Brescia (14 cases) and Vicenza (6 cases). The lower incidence in southern regions could be due to the lower prevalence of intensive cattle breeding in this area.

According to Italian law: (a) BSE tests are now conducted on all slaughtered animals aged 24 months or older; (b) Specific Risk Materials are eliminated from carcasses and destroyed. However some farmer associations are calling for prompt implementation of EU Regulation CE 1139/2003, which sets the minimum age for the compulsory BSE test at 30 months.

The Italian Government recently approved compensatory payments for farmers that suffered economic losses from positive BSE cases on their farms and the subsequent elimination of animals. The compensation for lost revenue is Euro 413 per adult animal eliminated. Payments for calves are adjusted according to another formula. Farmers are also entitled to additional premiums for the purchase of replacement calves/cows.

Consumer demand for bovine meat has steadily increased after the 2001 drop. According to farmer associations consumption could increase if Florentine bone-in steaks, currently banned from the market, are to come back.

### **Blue Tongue**

According to official statistics released by the Italian Ministry of Health, since the first Blue Tongue (BT) infection in the country in 2001 "there has been a sharp decline in the mortality thanks to a very effective vaccination campaign." Nevertheless farmer associations suggest that this statement is too optimistic and that the real loss to Italian farmers is far higher than reported.

Farmers also criticize the effectiveness of the vaccination campaign, especially as the vaccine available on the market is suspected of causing the death of healthy animals and substantial losses on the herds.

Official data from the Ministry of Health, on the other hand, show that post-vaccination losses (death of animals, reduced fertility, lower milk production) have a very low incidence on farms.

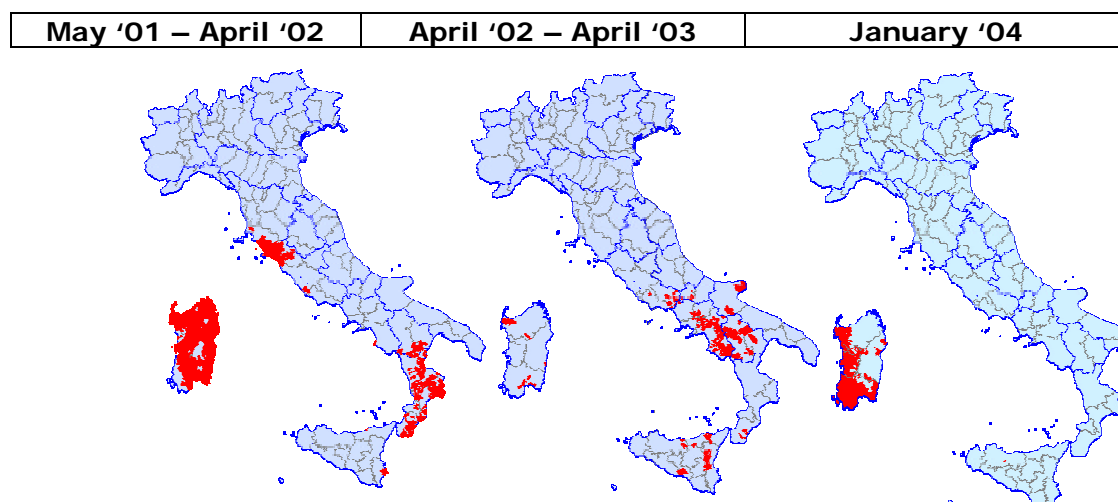
Although BT only causes death in sheep and goats, the vaccination campaign also involved cattle and buffalos because, even if they do not generally show symptoms, they may be vectors of the infection.

The BT infection in Italy has taken place in four epidemics: the first before May 2001, the second between May 2001 and April 2002, the third between April 2002 and April 2003, the fourth thereafter. The table below reports some brief data on the main trends of epidemics.

Period	Centers of infection	Num. animals centers	Of in	Affected animals	Deaths	Sacrificed
<b>Before May 2001</b>	6,889	n.a.		260,000	47,000	n.a.
<b>May 2001 – April 2002</b>	6,807	1,409,798		250,662	72,973	170,429
<b>April 2002 – April 2003</b>	432	48,251		3,628	2,978	305
<b>After April 2003</b>	3,634	979,189		86,995	66,039	2,284

Source: Italian Ministry of Health, January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2004

BT infection centers were located in southern regions as well as in the islands of Sicily and Sardinia. The last epidemic is concentrated on islands, especially in Sardinia, with no infection in the rest of Italy.



Source: Italian Ministry of Health

The Italian government set up a special commission to evaluate whether claims from farmers are legitimate and to decide whether to continue the vaccination campaign. Farmers are calling for a prompt cessation of the vaccination as they consider the losses they are suffering far worse than the infection itself. Farmer associations are also requesting increased government funding for prophylaxis expenses as well as compensation for losses incurred.

Related reports:

GM4002	01/16/2004	BSE in Germany – update covering 2003
E23150	08/07/2003	European Commission acts on pigmeat, BSE, and feed additives issue